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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BEIRUT 001339

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: LEBANON: INTERIOR MINISTER SAYS LACK OF TIME
HINDERS ELECTION REFORM

REF: BEIRUT 1327

Classified By: Ambassador Michele J. Sison for reason 1.4
(b) and (d)

SUMMARY

1. (C) Implementation of proposed election administration reforms will be difficult prior to the spring 2009 Parliamentary elections, according to Minister of Interior Ziyad Baroud, who is responsible for organizing the elections. Recognizing the value of the Boutros draft election reform proposals, Baroud regretted that there was insufficient time and resources to institute many of them. He stated that Lebanon will proceed with plans to adopt and implement a range of reforms in the hope they will all be in place in time for the municipal elections of 2010. He does not advocate delaying the date of the 2009 parliamentary elections to be able to implement all the proposed reforms, and is confident that his Ministry can undertake the administration of the 2009 elections in a transparent and effective manner. End summary.

2009 ELECTION TO BE HELD
IN APRIL 20-JUNE 20 TIMEFRAME

2. (C) In a September 10 meeting with the Ambassador, USAID Senior Deputy Assistant Administrator for the Middle East James Bever and embassy INL Director, Lebanese Minister of Interior and Municipalities Ziyad Baroud discussed Lebanon's plans on implementing proposed changes in election administration reforms. Elections in Lebanon are administered by the Ministry of Interior. The Boutros draft law on election reform proposes that the responsibility for the administration of elections should be transferred to a newly established Independent Election Commission. The new draft election law should be submitted to Parliament by September 25 but will not be voted on by Parliament before the second week of October, according to Baroud. Baroud stressed that his office is meeting three times a week to discuss proposals that can be fully implemented in the time remaining before the parliamentary elections. Baroud confirmed that many of the administration of elections' reforms proposed in the Boutros Draft Law will be impossible to implement within the short period of time remaining before the parliamentary election, scheduled to be held between April 20 and June 20, 2009.

SUPPORT FOR INDEPENDENT ELECTION COMMISSION,

BUT NO TIME

13. (C) Baroud, a longtime election reform advocate before becoming Minister, supports the concept of establishing an Independent Election Commission (IEC) as proposed in the Boutros Draft Law, but stated that it is not feasible to do so at this point, less than nine months from the election. Baroud cited EU and other NGO reports stating that full implementation of an IEC would require twelve months. To create an effective IEC, Lebanon would need to obtain Council of Ministers' approval, process nominations and appointments of members, locate premises, train civil servants, and transfer the official election responsibilities from the MOI to IEC. It is not possible to have an effective IEC up and running until October 2009, according to Baroud. If the law requires an IEC, then elections would have to be delayed until October 2009, which is something he does not advocate. He believes the Lebanese Parliament would not support any delay in elections.

14. (C) The IEC can be operational and should run the 2010 Municipal elections, Baroud said. Baroud noted that outcome of the 2010 municipal elections can be even more important for the direction of Lebanese politics, particularly after the changes that may ensue following the parliamentary elections.

DONATIONS TO SUPPORT IMPLEMENTATION OF ELECTION LAW)
TRANSPARENT, EFFECTIVE, NON-DUPLICATION
AND NO CASH, PLEASE

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15. (C) From September 25 through the end of October the MOI will schedule meetings with potential donors interested in supporting the changes proposed under the draft election law. Baroud is currently in the process of developing his "Master Plan" for donors, which will be the guiding document coordinating donor contributions. The MOI, through the Master Plan, will provide donors with implementation timelines and will identify specific needs. By developing these guidelines for the donors, Baroud and the Ministry aims to 1) be transparent, 2) avoid duplication and 3) have donations be effective. The donor's guidelines will state, for example, that this is what Lebanon has, and this is what Lebanese needs to implement the reforms and hold the elections. Donors will be asked to provide contributions solely in accord with this statement of needs.

16. (C) The MOI strongly prefers in-kind donations, not direct cash donations to the Lebanese government, to achieve transparency and avoid procurement headaches. The donation of loaned experts is acceptable, clarified Baroud, as long as the proffered expert is intimately familiar with the reality and functioning of Lebanon, and adapts his or her training to that Lebanese reality. Baroud, for example, said he had no problem with the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) or other organizations providing the expertise on voting matters, but he stressed that he would like to meet with them first. That way he can thoroughly explain the best method for them to assist Lebanon and provide what the MOI really needs. Baroud welcomes participation by representatives from the Carter Center, but reminded us that the visit must be organized through the proper diplomatic channels (NFI).

SINGLE VOTING DAY NOT FEASIBLE;
TWO DAYS MAY BE

17. (C) Baroud stressed that the Ministry is trying hard to meet the people's expectations as to what it should deliver on election reform, but he is concerned that they may be heading toward disappointment. Baroud mentioned that no MP

will ever say that he or she is against reform. It always comes down to implementation -- not enough time or money or manpower. Baroud is sorry to admit that there is not enough time to institute proposed changes prior to the election.

¶18. (C) Baroud also confirmed that the proposal to shorten the number of voting days to one, from four, cannot be implemented due to the lack of sufficient Internal Security Forces' personnel to cover all the polling stations and ballot boxes on the same day (reftel). Now the government is leaning toward adopting a change for elections to take place over a two day period.

¶19. (C) The Minister also cited the delays that ensue from awaiting Ministerial-level approvals for all reform proposals (e.g., out-of-country voting) and the release of funding to implement proposed reforms. The proposal for the Ministry to issue a national voter ID was almost defeated from the start due to a lack of funds. The MOI needed \$1 million to get the ID underway, but the government refused to accelerate funds for the project. Baroud obtained the money by asking the Internal Security Forces (ISF) Director General to transfer funds originally designated for ISF security purposes to the National Voter ID project. Baroud promised him he would pay back the ISF, which is part of his Ministry.

PROJECTS TO SUPPORT
DECENTRALIZATION OF MUNICIPALITIES

¶10. (SBU) USAID Senior Deputy Assistant Administrator James Beaver asked the Minister how the U.S. could best utilize its development assistance in the area of local government and municipal assistance. Baroud, a technical and academic expert in municipal governance, mentioned that Lebanon had recently formed a Consultative Commission on Decentralization, and he would welcome U.S. assistance in that area. Lebanon would benefit greatly from a national master plan for municipalities that establishes a comprehensive approach, and which adopts decentralization as a goal, particularly with regard to administrative and

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financial responsibilities. The hope is that a draft law on municipalities will be presented in seven months, and to have the law voted upon by parliament prior to the 2010 municipal elections.

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